GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON: BLACK PLANTATION OWNER

by

PREPARED FOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ASSOCIATES

4 MAY 1981

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GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON. BLACK PLANTATION OWNER

4 MAY 1981

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ABSTRACT

This is one of the first instances when eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places has been tested against criteria of local significance for a place associated with a black American.

George Berry Washington, an Arkansas black man, was born on December 25, 1864 and raised in nearly total obscurity. An intensive inquiry was conducted into his life and times, through his death on August 30, 1928. A comparison was made of George Berry Washington's career in Crittenden County to the careers of other successful blacks of northeastern Arkansas, particularly with Scott Bond of St. Francis County and of Pickens Black of Jackson County. One additional county, Conway, in central Arkansas was examined and no comparable individual was found among blacks there.

Washington's accomplishments are remarkable. He may well have been born in slavery, and he lived through the violence of Reconstruction and its suppression by the "White Redeemers." Most of his adult life was spent in the era of Plessy vs. Ferguson, which legalized racial segregation and eased the way for the legal subordination of southern black Americans.

The development of the history associated with George Berry Washington shows he succeeded as a church leader, farmer, mason, and businessman despite the adversity of violent times after the Civil War and of devastating floods in the Mississippi Basin. He survived in Crittenden County while black discontent motivated many blacks to join the Exoduster movement to Kansas or the back-to-Africa movement to Liberia.

In the face of the death by gunfire of hundreds of nearby black farmers in 1919, and of the devastating floods of 1927, George Berry Washington prospered. His landholdings meet all known criteria for the classification of a plantation. He employed sharecroppers and renters. Chattel mortgage agreements he held and his payment of important bank loans reflect his business acumen.

Local informants provided considerable information on the extent and placement of former buildings on his plantation and remembered Uncle George, as they called him, as having a fair complexion.

The Iroquois Research Institute finds that George Berry Washington's life and achievements meet the test of local significance for the National Register of Historic Places when evaluating sites or places associated with him. While not meeting the criterion for national significance, the institute believes there remains a question of potential regional eligibility that subsequent research may resolve.

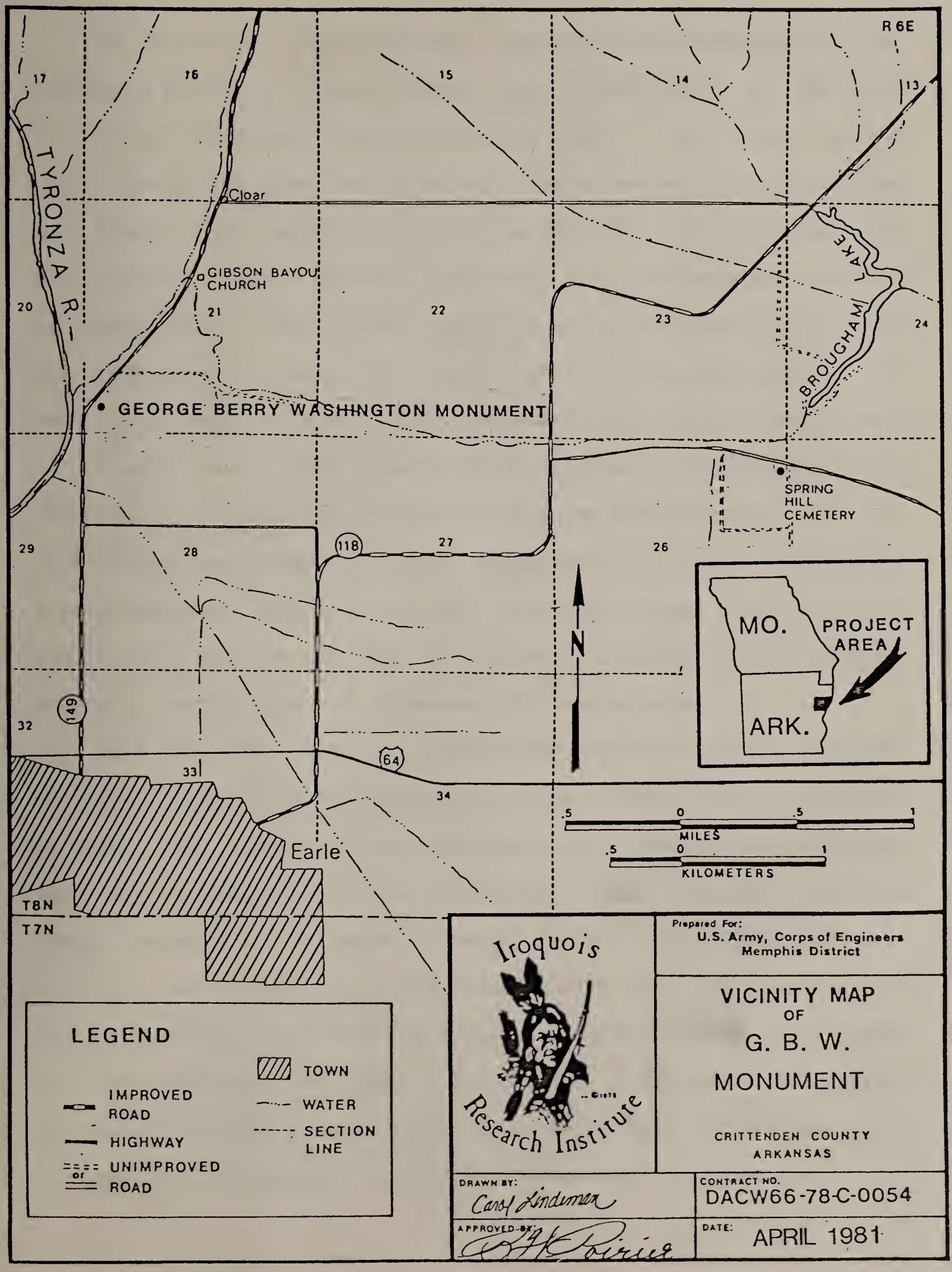
INTRODUCTION

On 5 September 1979, Iroquois Research Institute was directed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, to conduct an investigative survey for cultural resources in the Big Creek Enlargement and Diversion Project area in Northwestern Crittenden County, Arkansas.

On 23 October 1979, Institute researchers, during a preliminary site investigation, first encountered a prominent cultural landmark of the area, the lofty shaft of granite and marble topped by a marble angel that marks the grave of the Reverend George Berry Washington. From the memorial's inscription it could be determined that the Reverend Washington, 1864-1928, had been a preacher and a member of the Masonic Order. Detailed measurements by Iroquois Research Institute personnel established that the monument's base measures 109 centimeters by 80 centimeters, and extends 170 centimeters in height. It is topped by a marble angel 140 centimeters high, giving this monument a total height of 310 centimeters. The location of the George Berry Washington Memorial site on the east side of State Route 149 is shown in Plate 1.

Although the monument would not be directly affected by the Big Creek Project, such an imposing memorial in rural Arkansas, and its subject, merited further research. From preliminary archival searches and interviews with local residents it was determined that George Berry Washington, a black man, had been the owner of a plantation of over 1,000 acres, a general store, and a cotton gin.

PLATE 1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TYRONZA R.
Cloar
GIBSON BAYOU CHURCH
20
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23
24
LAKE BROUGHAM
GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON MONUMENT
SPRING HILL CEMETERY
29
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118
27
26
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MO.
PROJECT AREA
ARK.
32
149
33
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34
.5 0 .5 1
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KILOMETERS
Earle
T8N
T7N
LEGEND
IMPROVED ROAD
HIGHWAY
UNIMPROVED or ROAD
TOWN
WATER
SECTION LINE
Iroquois Research Institute
Prepared For:
U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers
Memphis District
VICINITY MAP
OF
G. B. W.
MONUMENT
CRITTENDEN COUNTY
ARKANSAS
DRAWN BY:
Carol Lindeman
CONTRACT NO.
DACW66-78-C-0054
APPROVED BY:
DATE:
APRIL 1981

The main site of the Washington plantation is located on the left descending bank of the Tyronza River, west of State Route 149. The ruins of a wooden bridge that once spanned Gibson Bayou, a feed trough, a ground silo, a cement and brick foundation, and a poured concrete foundation floor on a cinder block foundation are all that are left. Only the cement and brick foundation can be definitely associated with the plantation of George Berry Washington. This has been identified as the foundation of his cotton gin, which blew up sometime in the early 1920's. Nothing else remains. It is by his monument on Route 149 that George Berry Washington is remembered.

Clearly, more should be known about a black man who had risen to local prominence in a state often marked by explosive race relations, at a time of deteriorating economic and social conditions for blacks. Accordingly, Iroquois Research Institute historical researchers began a more intensive inquiry into the life and times of the Reverend George Berry Washington, preacher, planter, and rural Arkansas black entrepreneur.

On 6 March 1981, Historic Preservation Associates, acting as agents for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, directed Iroquois Research Institute to compile "an analysis of the uniqueness of Mr. George Berry Washington and his contemporaries as successful and minority business persons/entrepreneurs in eastern Arkansas during the late 1800's and early 1900's." The analysis was to determine whether "the accomplishments of these individuals confer National Register of Historic Places significance to sites associated with these individuals....." (Historic Preservation Associates to Iroquois Research Institute, 6 March 1981.) This study, based upon research interrupted in mid-1980, focuses upon that question.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The region surrounding the Big Creek project can claim some historic distinction. The most devastating earthquake in recorded American history, the New Madrid shocks of late 1811 and early 1812, resulted in the sinking of an entire region 150 miles long and 40 miles wide to a depth of three to nine feet in Southwestern Tennessee and Northeastern Arkansas. Rivers changed their courses, lakes drained, and thousands of fertile acres were covered by a layer of sand. Local preachers proclaimed the end of the world. For generations afterward, the region was known locally as the "sunk country." Only the absence of population centers had averted a catastrophic loss of life (Penick 1976; Halstead n.d.). A news account of that day is reproduced in Plate 2.

A little more than fifty years later the area would not be so fortunate. At the close of the Civil War, in April, 1865, the steamer Sultana was carrying Union soldiers to St. Louis for mustering out. On the night of 27 April, near Marion, Arkansas, and now because of changes in the river course, only about 10 miles from the George Berry Washington Plantation, the Sultana was ripped apart by an explosion and burst into flames. Over 1,500 passengers died (The Memphis Argus, 28 April, 1865, 3; 29 April, 1865, 3; 13 May, 1865, 3). About as many would be lost on the Titanic.

Arkansas had at least been spared the worst ravages of the Civil War, although the region suffered from guerilla raids.

But the war's aftermath found the state in chaos, as white residents refused to adopt the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which,

Hartford Mercury.

PLATE 2

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, PUBLISHED BY ELISHA BABCOCK, (PRINTER OF THE LAWS OF THE UNION.)

[VOL. XXVIII.] WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1812. [NO. 1442]

"NEW MADRID EARTHQUAKES" 1811-1812

Eyewitness Accounts

eologists, historians, l anthropologists have culated that local physgraphy and prehistoric sources in the study area e affected by the series earthquakes starting in l-December, 1811 and exding to March, 1812.

These hypotheses are parcularly well presented by rse and Morse in their bree archaeological rt (1977:4-4).

Charleston, Jan. 24.

Earthquake.—Yesterday morning, at fteen minutes after nine o'clock, anoth shock was felt in this city. The viratory motion was more severe than any e experienced last month, and continued for one minute. The pavements several of the streets are cracked, y the loosening of the cement; and a ree story brick house in King street, elonging to Mr. Brownlee, has received ery considerable injury. The walls are racked from the top to the bottom, and he wooden work and plaistering, in the nside, are split and broken. Many ersons in different parts of the city were ensible of a shock at eight o'clock in the oorning. Several families left their eds. Both these concussions were unccompanied with any noise.

From Liberty Hall.—[*Cincinnati, Ohio.*]

The Earthquake.—An interesting letter from a gentleman of respectability, dated at Chickasaw Bluffs, December 21, states, that the first shock of the earthquake occurred at 30 minutes past 2 o'clock, in the morning of the 16th. the same time it seems to have been felt in the Atlantic states and in this country. That shock was followed during the 16th and the following night by nineteen others; on the 17th there were three, and the following night several others; on the 18th there were seven shocks, and several through the succeeding night; on the 20th there were five, and on the 21st, when the letter was written, the earth was still trembling. The first and second vibrations, and that between 11 and 12 o'clock on the 17th, were the most violent.

The effect of these shocks appear to have been of the most alarming kind. The barge commanded by the author of the letter was anchored in 2 1-2 fathoms water, about 17 miles below New Madrid, or 87 below the mouth of the Ohio. The boat was acted on by the water in a manner that excited a supposition of her being grounded, but upon sounding, they could find no bottom. The current increased to three times the velocity it had the preceding evening; the crew of a boat at the shore testified that the river rose six feet in a short time; and that no spot on the land was to be found that was not (as they expressed it) "giving." Two flat-bottomed boats that were laying at the shore were destroyed. One was broken entirely to pieces, and the other overtured—the crew saved themselves.

At the second shock, millions of trees that were imbedded in the mud in the bottom of the river, suddenly had one end elevated to the surface, rendering the river almost impassable. At the same time the banks were shook into the river in large masses. Upon passing the Little Prairie, the inhabitants were found to have all fled to the high lands. It was stated by some hunters near the Bayou river, that the ground was cracked into innumerable fissures, and large quantities of water were issuing out of them. An island just above the mouth of the Bayou river, was extremely agitated, and seemed to require but little to sink it. The lakes which lie in the valley of the Mississippi, were discharging large quantities of water into that river; and the water fowl of that region were observed throughout the whole of the 16th to keep constantly on the wing.

The writer of the letter had not heard from any place farther down the river than the Chickasaw Bluffs, about 176 miles below the mouth of the Ohio; but his letter closes with an expression of the deepest anxiety respecting the country nearer the Gulph.

We are, however, credibly informed that a letter has been received from New Orleans, dated the 20th of December, which is entirely silent as to the earthquake.

The Earthquake.—We continue to receive accounts of this phenomenon of nature from all quarters. The following letter from a subscriber informs us of being felt on the Ohio; and the subjoined article, from a Charleston paper, apprizes us of its effects having extended as far south as that place. It will be observed that in Charleston and this place, (Washington) the shocks were simultaneously felt, or, at most, within five or ten minutes of the same moment; whilst, on the Ohio, the shock was felt an hour earlier than at either this city or Charleston. If any thing is to be inferred from this circumstance, it is, that progress of the subterranean impulse, caused the shock, was from west

Were we to give the reins to agination, we might conjecture, ast and almost unexplored region the Mississippi and Pacific, the of the cause of this tremen-

Coshocton, Ohio, Jan. 23d, 1812.

MR. EDITOR,

This morning, at seventeen minutes past eight o'clock, a severe shake of an earthquake was felt in this place. It lasted nearly a minute; it shook so as to nearly half empty a bucket, standing on the floor, full of water; and the river being frozen over, it caused the ice to crack considerably. A stone chimney in the house of col. Williams in this place, seven by five feet square, solid & well built, was so severely shaken as to cause it to crack several places; and one or perhaps more brick chimneys in this place have been considerably injured by the shock. I have been informed that several houses in the neighborhood of this place were so shook that much of the chinkin dropt out; and the commotion of the trees and bushes was so great as to cause persons in the woods to observe the phenomenon. The shock was succeeded by a thick haze, and several people were affected with giddiness, although the air was quite serene at the time of the shock. The course of the above shock was from S. W. to N. E. nearly.

A. JOHNSON.

in effect, enfranchised the newly-freed blacks. As a result, the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 declared the state government illegal, and placed Arkansas under direct federal military rule.

Crittenden County continued in turmoil during the early years of Reconstruction; two black infantry companies kept what order they could under a state of martial law.

Not suprisingly, the Ku Klux Klan, centered in Memphis just across the Mississippi, and the Knights of the White Camelia were active in Crittenden County. In fact, the thriving town of Earle, the nearest population center to the project site, was named for Major Josiah Frances Earle, leader of the Knights of the White Camelia (Clayton 1915) who possibly was also involved with the Klan. Earle went about in fear of assassination in those lawless days, and supposedly was rescued by the Klan and narrowly escaped being hanged by the Army (The Commercial Appeal, 1947). In disgust he authorized his wife in his will to sell all of his real property and "reinvest in some better county, for herself and children" (Crittenden County Courthouse, Will Records, vol. B219).

A glimpse of those unsettled and violent times in Crittenden County is given in the account by a white plantation lady of a visit by the black militia.

> Two of my hands (Sam Ladd and Ed Lowden) went last Tuesday night to Marion and reported to the militia that I owed them and wouldn't pay - that I kept a gang of Ku Klux about me - that Louis was a bushwacker and was gone all the fall to Augusta and other places

> fighting the military - that I settled with my hands with four or five men standing by armed with guns and pistols ready to shoot them down if they murmurred with every lie they think of (Earle-Ward Family Collection 1869).

The writer also claimed that the military had taken the horses, guns, and even the counterpane from the bed.

Yet in the midst of these troubles, blacks were able to establish themselves in some positions of official responsibility. Crittenden County settled down to a grudging acceptance of Reconstruction, and adopted the fusion form of politics, with Democrats and Republicans dividing offices by prearrangement. During these years, of a total of 22 justices of the peace, 19 were black. A black man, A.H. Ferguson, served three terms as county treasurer, and two other blacks, Daniel Lewis and David Ferguson, held offices as county judge and county clerk, respectively. The County Assessor's office was usually filled by blacks. The blacks, of course, were always Republican.

But had Major Earle been a little more patient he would have found matters much more to his liking after 1888. By that time Crittenden Democrats felt strong enough to act upon their conviction that the county was "getting too small for... educated niggers and...white folks" (Featherstone vs. Cate, 51st Congress, 1st Session, Report # 306:9).

In July, 1888, a group of 80 white men marched to the Marion County courthouse and demanded the resignation of David Ferguson. Both Ferguson and Lewis were indicted for "habitual drunkeness." Other black officers quit the area and were replaced by whites. More officially, in the

elections of that year, Democrats won control of the county, aided by the use of double-chambered and slotted ballot boxes ordered especially from Memphis. David Ferguson was forced to flee for his life. It was the end of any political role for blacks in Crittenden County, and was "regarded as a great joke on poor Sambo" (Morgan 1906:121-126).

The plight of southern blacks was exacerbated after 1896 by the U.S. Supreme Court's Plessy vs. Ferguson decision, establishing the doctrine of "separate but equal" in U.S. race relations. Separate indeed, but rarely equal, the political, economic, and social condition of southern blacks would continue to deteriorate.

ECONOMIC SETTING

Arkansas has always been predominantly a rural state. During the antebellum period, plantation slavery was the preferred method of raising a cash crop (Pitcaithley 1978) and was concentrated in the valleys of the White, Red, Arkansas, Ouachita and Mississippi rivers. Because of the expansion of agriculture into these areas in the decade just preceding the Civil War, Arkansas was a cotton frontier state when the war began.

Because its cotton frontier status differentiated Arkansas from the older, settled regions in the South, Arkansas had no problem with soil exhaustion since much of the land would not reach maximum production until several more years of use. A large part of the labor force cleared land, built levees and established drainage systems to open new lands. Because this work was unpleasant it gave Arkansas a bad name among the slaves. Arkansas also suffered a serious health problem with outbreaks of malaria and yellow fever common in the lowlands (Taylor 1958).

Arkansas could boast few elaborate plantation dwellings in the style of those of Louisiana or Mississippi. Rather than neat brick row quarters, the slave quarters were likely to be log cabins. The planter's house was probably similarly constructed but on a larger scale (Ibid.).

The Civil War disrupted plantation activities in the state, but the damage inflicted by invading armies was minimal compared to constant guerrilla raids and skirmishes. Many planters moved their slaves from the exposed river bottoms to more remote lands in the state or evacuated them to Texas. Accordingly, Arkansas' black population by the end of the war was less than it had been in 1860 (Gannett 1894; Dougan 1976).

Even though the Civil War did not destroy the plantation system, planters wondered what kind of labor system would replace slavery. The Arkansas Gazette, the leading conservative paper in the state, noted that "the question most seriously involving the prosperity of the people of this state at this time, is not negro suffrage, but negro labor, not whether he shall vote, but whether he will work" (Arkansas Gazett 1868). The newspaper also argued that paying freedmen wages would lead to immediate consumption rather than saving, the congregating of blacks in towns, and planters bidding against one another to secure workers. Further, "give him fixed wages, and he works lazily and carelessly" (Ibid.). The labor shortage became so critical in Arkansas that some planters signed contracts to import Chinese laborers (Arkansas Gazette 1870).

The freedmen wanted their own farms. Tabbs Gross, the editor of the first black newspaper in Arkansas, advocated black land ownership (Arkansas Gazette 1869). The black farmer, however, found few opportunities to become a landowner. Whitelaw Reed (quoted in Ransom and Sutch 1977:86) observed after the war that the "feeling against any ownership of the soil by negroes is so strong that, the man who should sell small tracts to them would be in actual personal danger. Great effort will be made to prevent negroes from acquiring land."

According to a study of Arkansas plantations, "the combination of three factors--the scarcity of capital, the need of workers by the plantation owners, and the need of livelihood by the former slaves-found a solution in the tenant system" (Alexander 1943). As it developed, the highest form of tenant is the renter, supplying all operating capital in

addition to the labor necessary for cultivating and harvesting the crop. The renter pays a fixed sum of cash to the landlord and retains the entire crop, but in some cases his rent may be a portion of the crop (Ibid.).

In addition to working and harvesting the crop, the share tenant supplies the operating capital and may pay part of other production costs. In Arkansas he has usually paid one fourth of his cotton and one third of his corn as rent (Ibid.). The sharecropper is at the bottom of the agricultural rung; he furnishes labor to cultivate and harvest the crop, pays a very small part of the production costs and receives one half of the harvest (Ibid.).

Many plans for working the land were in use by the mid-1870's. Even though sharecropping prevailed, other types of labor systems included leasing with or without supplies, working for wages, and leasing to squads and squad leaders (King 1972).

The Report on the Cotton Production of the State of Arkansas (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1880) showed that in 1870 Arkansas had produced only 67.5 percent of what the state had produced in 1860. This report also noted the labor systems in use. Respondents from several counties preferred the wage system in which wage hands worked for money wages by the day, week or month and had no crop of their own (Alexander 1943).

But the report from Crittenden County included the following impressionistic endorsement of cropping.

> It is better for both owner and laborer when the contract is faithfully carried out. The negro has his home, garden, 'patch', and fuel free of charge; has

the loan of a cow, if he does not own one. He generally raises pigs (all his own), and his house is situated 'away' from the 'quarter'. These conditions engender feelings of respectibility and pride at home, a laudable ambition to excel in farming, and to a great extent obviate the necessity of overseeing the part of the owner. The best class of colored citizens work this way, and prefer it. Only a portion of the land is able to be worked in this manner. When hired labor is employed, the hands are irresponsible, lazy, and vicious and require wages every Saturday. When paid they leave for the city; when 'broke' they return and work another week; are inveterate gamblers, and are called 'roustabouts' (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1880:106).

Nearly all sharecroppers borrowed from the planter during the spring and summer for living expenses. The planter was paid out of their half of the crop when it was sold in the fall (Alexander 1943). The landowner sometimes opened a plantation store himself, extended credit and took the year's cotton in payment. The landowner weighed the cotton himself and ginned it in his own gin. It was not uncommon for the tenant to find at the end of the season that he had not paid off the original debt. Thad Snow, a white cotton planter in the Missouri bootheel, commented that "chisling croppers out of their cotton money was embedded deeply into the tradition of cotton growing" (Snow 1954:199). According to an old story:

> A tenant offering five bales of cotton was told, after some owl-eyed figuring, that this cotton exactly balanced his debt. Delighted at the prospect of making a profit this year, the tenant reported that he had one more bale which he hadn't brought in yet. 'Shucks', shouted the boss, 'why didn't you tell me that before? Now I'll have to figure the account all over again to make it come out even' (Johnson et al. quoted in Alexander 1943:65)

Several attempts in the 19th century were made to remedy the croppers' plight. The first overt manifestation of black discontent was the Exoduster movement to Kansas. Although Painter (1977), the author of Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction, excluded Arkansas from her study of the movement, evidence indicates that considerable interest existed in the state. A state convention of blacks in 1879 discussed the Kansas experiment and a number of black families made the trip (Arkadelphia Southern Standard 1879). White newspapers, however, emphasized the difficulties of emigrating to a new state, probably to discourage other blacks from following (Segraves 1973).

The second manifestation of black discontent was the "back to Africa movement." Many small black farmers sold their land to raise the money needed to make the trip to Liberia. Some Arkansas blacks, however, found themselves stranded in New York. According to one account, 96 men, women and children had "left Arkansas to avoid oppression. Except that they were not held in bondage, their condition was worse than when slavery existed" (Arkansas Gazette 1880).

On 15 February 1882, the Wattensas Farmers' Club in Prairie County organized to resist expanding tenancy, "anaconda" mortgages, high prices for merchandise and low prices for cotton. The name was soon changed to the Agricultural Wheel. Initially a white organization, the Wheel soon found that black farmers shared the same problems. The Wheel grew rapidly and entered politics to support its economic goals (Wheeler 1975; Elkins 1955). In 1885 the Wheel merged with the Brothers of Freedom and then combined with the Farmers' Alliance in 1888. The organizational efforts of farmers and tenants culminated in the formation of a national third party known as the People's or Populist Party (Ferguson 1966), but Populism apparently had little effect on Arkansas tenant farmer conditions.

Two abortive 20th century organizations attempted to mobilize Arkansas black farmers early in the 20th century. In 1919 a black sharecroppers' union in Phillips County, the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America, tried to obtain better settlements from white planters. The two sides physically confronted each other, and something like a full-scale battle raged before the violence was suppressed. The appalling total of nearly 300 blacks perished in the gunfire. Sixty-five blacks were indicted for murder, although the U.S. Supreme Court (Moore vs. Dempsey) overturned the pro forma death sentences. The union, however, was broken (Rogers 1961; Butts and James 1962).

In the 1930's, New Deal agricultural policies that encouraged planters to pocket government money and give nothing to the croppers except eviction notices, prompted the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers

Union in 1934. Again, violence was used successfully against a tenant farmers union, although this time there were no dead to be hauled away in stake-bed trucks as in 1919 (Kester 1962; Conrad 1965; Auerbach 1968).

The population of the county continued to increase; the 1880 census total of 9,415 increased to 13,940 by 1890 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1883a:100-101, 1895a:62). The state's campaign to encourage immigration to Arkansas had probably promoted some of this population growth in the countryside, and the Federal Government had set aside thousands of acres in Arkansas for internal improvements, development of natural resources, and the establishment of educational facilities. Settlers could purchase some of these lands for as little as fifty cents an acre (Henry 1873; Walz 1958; Thompson 1968), and all males and females of legal age were entitled to a homestead consisting of 160 acres. The land itself was free and the homesteader received title after residing on the land for five years and making improvements (Henry 1873).

The number of farms in the county was also increasing. A comparison of farm numbers and size for the years 1860 and 1870 is shown in Table 1. However this did not mean that more people owned their own farm. According to the studies of Woofter (1971) and Prunty (1955), the tenant system or "fragmented plantation" occupancy emerged on landholdings that had previously supported an antebellum plantation system. Census statistics seemed to indicate a land tenancy system composed of sharecroppers who split the crop proceeds equally with the owner, and renters who paid a specified annual amount of produce or a stipulated sum.

TABLE 1

FARM NUMBERS AND SIZE IN ACRES IN CRITTENDEN COUNTY, ARKANSAS		
ACRES	1860	1870
Less than 3	0	0
3 to 9	6	124
10 to 19	33	231
20 to 49	63	391
50 to 99	33	155
100 to 499	62	93
500 to 999	4	4
1,000 and over	1	0
TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMS	202	998

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1864:193, 1872:345.

The 1880 census classified the farms in the county according to tenure. This classification is shown in Table 2. According to these statistics, 48.24 percent of the farms were rented for shares of production, 28.79 percent were rented for fixed money rental, and 22.97 were cultivated by the owner. The largest number of farms that were rented for shares of production fell into the 10 to 49 acres category (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1883b: 32-33).

TABLE 2

NUMBER AND SIZE OF FARMS AND CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO TENURE: 1880
CRITTENDEN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

ACRES	CLASS I - CULTIVATED BY OWNER	CLASS II - RENTED FOR FIXED MONEY RENTAL	CLASS III RENTED FOR SHARES OF PRODUCE	TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMS
Less than 3	0	0	0	0
3 to 9	2	14	9	25
10 to 19	15	74	190	279
20 to 49	23	88	197	308
50 to 99	30	32	28	90
100 to 499	98	40	14	152
500 to 999	28	6	1	35
1,000 and over	13	8	0	21
TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMS	209	262	439	910

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1883b:32-33.

In spite of the land tenancy system, economic development of the Big Creek area and the county continued. In addition to liberal public land policies, extensive drainage projects contributed to regional prosperity. As discussed in the overview of the cultural resources of the St. Francis River Basin (Iroquois Research Institute 1978), the basin and its surrounding counties had a much slower growth rate than the state as a whole because of the area's frequent inundation, poor drainage, and resultant health problems. Some county organizations, individual planters, and state agencies constructed levees, but the system was never

complete or continuous until well into the 20th century. Consequently, major floods ravaged the region in 1858, 1862, 1867, 1882, 1883, 1884, 1893, and "medium" floods occurred almost annually (Burke et al. n.d.).

After the St. Francis Levee District of Arkansas, of which Crittenden County is a part, was formed in 1893, a concerted effort was begun for the organized construction of ditches and levees for protection against floods. The question of assessing and levying an annual levee tax was submitted to a vote of the land owners in each county in the levee district. Crittenden County was the only county in the district to vote against the tax.

According to the authors of the official St. Francis Levee District history, "this was largely because the Crawfordsville Ridge in Crittenden County was comparatively high, above the ordinary overflows, and many of the people in the then sparsely settled county lived on this high ground and a few high ridges" (Ibid.: 22). It was not until Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1928 that the Federal Government committed itself to a comprehensive program of flood control along the Mississippi River (Clay 1976). The floods of 1927, the worst in Mississippi Basin history, had inundated one-fifth of the entire area of Arkansas (Works Progress Administration 1941), and had provided the impetus for far-reaching legislation.

During this same period, Jay Gould and other entrepreneurs realized that only railroads could effectively exploit the virgin timber of Arkansas (Ibid.). Consequently, railroad building and the lumber industry developed simultaneously. By 1893, there were three railroads in the St.

Francis Levee District: the Memphis and Little Rock, running from Madison to Hopefield; the Kansas City, Fort Scott and Memphis, running from Jonesboro, by way of Marked Tree, to old West Memphis; and the Memphis and Bald Knob, extending by way of Wynne across the district into Memphis (Burke et al. n.d.).

Many of the towns in the Big Creek area owned their development to the railroad and lumber industries. Earle, the largest, remained surrounded by its virgin timber until the late 19th century, when the Memphis and Bald Knob portion of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad entered the area (Woolfolk 1967; Herndon 1922). Earle's citizens voted to incorporate the town in 1905. The coming of the railroads, drainage, and timber cutting spurred the growth of other once-sleepy hamlets in the area: Heafer, Norvell and Cloar. Norwell was also known confusingly as "New Earle", even though it had proceded Earle proper. In 1978 the two towns were consolidated.

Crittenden County experienced a surge in population between the years 1900 and 1910 as the total number of inhabitants climbed to 22,447 from the 1900 total of only 12,290 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1901:66-67; Ibid. 1913a:231). Blacks now comprised the majority at 19,000 (Ibid.). By 1910, the town of Earle had a population of 1,542.

Farms increased in number steadily between 1900 and 1930 as timber was cleared and wetlands drained. The number of farms and their sizes for these years is shown in Table 3. The statistics show that the 20 and under 50 acres category had the largest number of farms. Census farms are operating units, not ownership tracts, and the land assigned each tenant is

counted as a separate farm. This category is probably indicative of the size of many of the tenant farms, and if the census statistics that classify farms according to the tenure of operators are examined, the relationship becomes more apparent.

TABLE 3

FARM NUMBERS AND SIZE IN ACRES IN CRITTENDEN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

ACRES	1900	1910	1920	1930
Less than 3	0	0	2	0
3 to 9	81	82	196	276
10 to 19	521	994	1,790	2,986
20 to 49	1,080	2,057	3,041	4,315
50 to 99	143	334	286	299
100 to 174	81	121	83	74
175 to 259	38	24	24	30
260 to 499	35	22	44	29
500 to 999	15	4	11	25
1,000 and over	14	5	19	10
TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMS	2,008	3,643	5,496	8,044

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1902:60-61, 1913:106, 1922:562 1922:562, 1932a:1143.

The classification of farms by tenure for these years is shown in Table 4. The table shows that a growing majority of the farms were operated by tenants. The tenancy rate was 85.65 percent in 1900, 88.66 percent in 1910, 88.88 percent in 1920, and 94.83 percent in 1930. By

1930, black farm operators numbered 7,006; and of this total, 6,754 or 96.4 percent were tenants (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1932a: 1143).

TABLE 4

CLASSIFICATION OF FARMS BY TENURE OF OPERATOR
CRITTENDEN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

TENURE	1900	1910	1920	1930
Farms Operated by Owners	269	410	558	382
Farms Operated by Tenants	1,720	3,230	4,885	7,628
Farms Operated by Managers	19	3	53	34
TOTAL NUMBER OF FARM OPERATORS	2,008	3,643	5,496	8,044

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1922:562, 1932a:1143.

The economy of the area depended on cotton. Crittenden County had 7,515 cotton farms out of a total of 8,044 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1932b:780). According to a contemporary newspaper account, the county was the second largest cotton producer among Arkansas counties (Crittenden County Times 1931a). But the economic depression of the 1930's forced cotton prices to a century low, and the drought of 1930 made matters worse. As a result, the plight of the tenants became precarious and they even faced starvation (Crittenden County Times 1931b, 1931c).

In the following decade, tenant farmers in Crittenden County attempted to organize to alleviate their nearly intolerable conditions.

But, as noted earlier, violence and terrorism by landowners and law enforcement authorities crushed the movement, as local informants well remember (Hood, personal communication; Kester 1962; Auerbach 1968).

During World War II farm laborers lost little time in quitting the county, and few would return after the war (Rogers 1974; Prunty 1955).

Since the end of the Second World War, the area has seen the rise of larger, fewer farms, and the decline of cotton to the extent that soybeans now account for 85 percent of all tillable land in the Earle vicinity (Prunty 1955; U.S. Department of Agriculture 1974). Table 5 illustrates this change and that, once again, the white population was in the majority (Arkansas Department of Planning 1973).

TABLE 5

FARM NUMBERS AND SIZE IN ACRES AND TENURE OF OPERATORS: 1950
CRITTENDEN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

ACRES	NUMBER	TENURE	NUMBER
Less than 3	12	Full Owners	470
3 to 9	1,389	Part Owners	194
10 to 29	2,912	Managers	44
30 to 49	704	Cash Tenants	480
50 to 99	407	Share-cash Tenants	595
100 to 179	170	Share Tenants	757
180 to 259	71	Croppers	3,296
260 to 499	96	Other and Unspecified Tenants	64
500 to 999	90		
1,000 and over	49		
TOTAL NUMBER OF FARMS	5,900	TOTAL NUMBER OF OPERATORS	5,900

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1952:68.

GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON

Up From Obscurity

George Berry Washington was born on Christmas Day, 1864. Although his father was born in Kentucky and his mother in South Carolina, they were living in Arkansas at the time of his birth (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1900:130). Beyond this we know nothing of his early life. We cannot even ascertain if Washington were born slave or free. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued the year before his birth, had freed only those slaves in states or portions of states in rebellion against the Union.

Arkansas at the time was still a rebel state and obviously would have paid no official attention to the Proclamation. There is the possibility that George Berry Washington may have come from free black stock; but, again, the record is mute. No photograph of him has been uncovered, and we know of his appearance only from the memories of local informants.

Research at the Crittenden County Courthouse and interviews with residents of the Earle, Arkansas area in which he would come to establish his plantation have yielded no information on his place of birth, childhood, or youth.

George Berry Washington's life continued in the historical shadows until 11 May 1883. On that day, he and Ella Roselle, age 18, applied for a marriage license at the Crittenden County Courthouse in Marion, Arkansas. Although the license states that Washington was 21 years old, according to his birthdate on that license and the 1900 U.S. Census, he was actually only 18. David Ferguson, the black county clerk, issued the license, and

on 25 May 1883, Elder White published the banns of matrimony and solemnized the rite (Crittenden County Courthouse, Marriage Record G:41). This is also the first record of Washington's living in Crittenden County (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1900:130).

Although the census lists his younger daughter's name as "Arrener," residents of the area and deed records identify her as Irene (Cloar, personal communication; Reed, personal communication; Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Books 140:361, 554, 142:7). "Arrener" may simply have been a corruption of "Irene." Although it is not known what became of Washington's first wife, courthouse records show that Washington remarried. On 27 May 1897, Lula Wright, age 25, and Washington, age 32, were married (Crittenden County Courthouse, Marriage Record K:274). There were no children from the second marriage.

Washington's accumulation of personal property and his pattern of land acquisition can be traced through courthouse records. The Personal Assessment records of 1882 and 1883 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Assessment 1882, 1883), do not list his name. Even though his name does appear in the 1884 records (Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Tax 1884:77), according to these records he was without personal property. It is not until the late 1880's that personal property is documented. Washington's distribution and value of his personal property for the years 1900 to 1925 is shown on Table 6 and Table 7. These personal assets would peak in 1918 with a total valuation of $2,710. His 1918 assets also included an automobile valued at $300 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Tax 1918:30).

TABLE 6

PERSONAL ASSETS OF GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON
(IN NUMBERS)

YEAR	HORSES	CATTLE	MULES AND ASSES	HOGS	CARRIAGES AND WAGONS	GOLD AND SILVER WATCHES	PIANOFORTES AND OTHER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS	AUTOS
1900	3	15	7	10	2	1	-	-
1905	2	8	4	5	3	-	-	-
1910	3	3	8	-	4	-	-	-
1915	2	2	8	5	3	1	1	-
1920	1	1	7	10	2	-	1	1
1925	3	7	12	3	-	-	-	2

Sources: Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Tax 1900:66, 1905:106, 1910:52, 1915:76.
Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Assessment Tax Books 1920:93, 1925:152.

TABLE 7

PERSONAL ASSETS OF GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON
(IN DOLLARS)

YEAR	VALUE OF HORSES, MULES, ASSES, HOGS, CATTLE, CARRIAGES, AND WAGONS	VALUE OF HOUSEHOLD AND KITCHEN GOODS AND SUPPLIES, AND MERCHANDISE	VALUE OF MONEY, BONDS, BALANCES OF BOOK ACCOUNTS	TOTAL VALUE OF OTHER PROPERTY REQUIRED TO BE LISTED	TOTAL
1900	$ 590	$ 300	-	$ 80	$ 970
1905	490	-	-	1,000	1,490
1910	1,050	1,000	-	100	2,150
1915	510	200	-	1,580	2,290
1920	510	50	-	210	770
1925	430	150	$500	220	$1,300

Sources: Crittenden County, Personal Tax 1900:66, 1905:106, 1910:52, 1915:76.
Crittenden County, Personal Assessment Tax Books 1920:93, 1925.

Washington did not acquire his first land until 1893. How he supported himself and his family between the years 1883 and 1893 could not be precisely determined. According to personal recollections (Chisum, personal communication), Washington came to the Earle area to pick cotton. In any case, he purchased 40 acres approximately one-quarter of a mile east of the tiny town of Cloar from George W. Patterson in November 1893, paying $200 "cash in hand" (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book G-2:462).

George Berry Washington accumulated the bulk of his property in the years 1893 to 1914. By the turn of the century he owned over 400 acres. How he acquired the knowledge of business methods necessary to operate complex enterprises, indeed, how and when he became literate remain unknown.

At the peak of his landholdings he held title to 1,054.38 acres, which were divided into five so-called plantations: the George Berry Washington Main Place of 518 acres, lying at the confluence of the Tyronza River and Gibson Bayou; Chatfield Plantation, 146 acres, just south of the Main Place; the Merriman Place, 160 acres, one-quarter mile west of the Tyronza River; the Harding Place, 70 acres, located approximately one and a half miles east of the Main Place; and the Dunning Place, 160 acres, separated by three and one fourth miles from the Main Place. A detailed description and the map locations of George Berry Washington's landholdings may be found in Appendix A.

Although the Washington land was divided into five plantations, there is no evidence that they were worked as anything other than a single unit or plantation.

The Washington Plantation

According to one authority, a southern plantation was comprised of six elements: "a landholding" large enough to be distinguishable from the larger family farm; a distinct division of labor and management functions, with management customarily in the hands of the owner; specialized agricultural production, usually with two or three specialties per proprietorship; location in some area of the South with a plantation tradition; distinctive settlement forms and arrangements reflecting, to a high degree, centralized control of cultivating power; and a relatively large input of cultivating power per unit of area (Prunty 1955:460).

George Berry Washington's landholdings would constitute a plantation by this definition. In terms of size, deed records indicate that Washington's land comprised five plantations "containing in the agregate one thousand and fifty-four and 38/100 (1,054.38) acres, more or less" (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book A-4:15).

Washington employed sharecroppers and renters to cultivate his landholdings. Even though it could not be determined how many tenants he employed, chattel mortgage records indicate that he rented land to at least 12 tenants in 1923, and that his daughter, Elizabeth Bowles, rented to at least 13 tenants in 1929 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Chattel Mortgage Record Book F4:337-349).

These records also indicate that cotton and corn, plantation specialties, were the main crops cultivated (Crittenden County Courthouse, Chattel Mortgage Record Books W-3:297-308, F-4:337-349).

Certainly the Washington land was located in one of the traditional southern plantation areas, and Crittenden County, in the Mississippi Valley, is considered a plantation stronghold (Prunty 1955).

Prunty further contends that sharecropper plantation settlement is usually dispersed rather uniformly throughout the cropland with an average of one homesite to each 30 to 40 acres (Ibid.:469). The 1929 chattel mortgage records indicates just such a distribution for the Washington landholdings.

The tenant houses on Washington's property usually faced a road and could be found along the bayou and river (Chisum, Hood, McCoy, personal communications). There was usually a tenant house on every 20 to 40 acres of land. A renter customarily had a barn on his parcel of land for his stock (Hood, personal communication). According to Liddie McCoy (personal communication), Washington himself had two barns, one "down from the gin and store, where the stock stayed," the other a big cow barn in the pasture across the bayou (Ibid.).

Washington's headquarters centered around his general store, gin and house. His role in the management of his plantation is implied by the presence of the store and gin and the existence of chattel mortgage agreements. These are the means by which other planters managed their affairs (Ransom and Sutch 1977). The real profits from Washington's plantation activities likely came from his store and gin, for some authorities indicate that the combination of landowning with furnishing was behind most economically successful rural men (Ibid.).

Yet Washington could suffer economic adversity. In 1914 he was compelled to borrow $12,000 from the firm of Caldwell and Smith, and his entire land was required for collateral (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book A-4:15). The promissory notes, which represented installments on the principal that he owed, were due on the 1st of January for several consecutive years.

Washington's economic troubles at the time may have been caused at least in part by the two great consecutive Mississippi River floods of 1912 and 1913.

The flood of 1912 broke all records south of Cairo, Illinois. The gauge at Memphis registered 45.23 feet, and over 10,000 acres were inundated. The flood of 1913 was even worse. This time the Memphis gauge read 46.55 feet, and in the St. Francis Levee District alone, the river broke through in five places, despite desperate efforts that saw convicts and free blacks working on the levees at gun point (Burke et al:204; Clay 1976:56-57).

However, succeeding years were good and Washington paid off the last of his loan in 1921. (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book 109:466).

Washington's steady accumulation of land during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is proof of his business acumen. However, he was not the only black in the Earle area who owned land; other black landowners were Henry Hensley, Elias Gibson, Henry Evans, Henry Jones and the four Cannamore brothers (Chisum, Cloar, Hood, Reed, personal communications).

Henry Jones lived by Gibson Bayou Church and owned forty acres as well as peach and apple orchards (Chisum, personal communication; McCoy, personal communication). According to Everett Hood (personal communication), Henry Hensley owned land to the east of Gibson Bayou, close to Highway 118. Tax records examined indicate that Henry Hensley owned land located approximately one and a half miles east of the confluence of Gibson Bayou and the Tyronza River and north of Gibson Bayou (Crittenden County Courthouse, Real Estate Assessment 1919:119, 1921:172, 1923,:19, 1925:19, 1927:19).

Henry Hensley employed several tenants and owned approximately 320 acres (Hood, personal communication) and the Cannamore brothers owned approximately 160 acres (Ibid.). John Gammon, Sr. owned 75 acres about six miles north of Marion (R.F. Russell, 1980:1). None of these black landowners, however, could begin to match George Berry Washington's holdings.

According to local informants, Washington was the largest black landowner in the Earle area during this period (Chisum, Hood, McCoy, Reed, Rogers, personal communications).

As the owner of a large plantation, Washington employed many renters and sharecroppers. The tenants and their farming activities were an integral part of the Washington plantation, but the life of a sharecropper or a renter was not an easy one. Emma Reed was a child when her grandparents, Joe and Ellen Bell, and her mother, Emma Brown, lived and worked on the Washington property in the late 1920's. As renters, her grandparents paid for the 40 acres they rented, but they owned their own mules, wagons, and plow tools. Her mother, who started working in the

fields when she was seven years old, was a sharecropper on a 15 acre plot and Washington supplied her with everything. She had to give him half of her cotton and corn crop, however (Reed, personal communication).

The five members of Emma Reed's family lived in a two-room wood house. According to her, it was not uncommon for five people to live in a house. Sometimes as many as eight to 10 people lived in the two-room houses on the Washington plantation. Most of the sharecroppers either had large families or tried to have large families to survive. Many raised their own gardens; the turnips and mustard greens fed the family during the summer months (Ibid.).

Neither courthouse records nor personal communications could provide exact information on the number of sharecroppers and renters on the Washington property. However, the chattel mortgage records provide some information on his tenants. In order to secure their rent and to obtain the necessary advances of supplies from Washington, the tenants used their personal property and their crops as collateral. This legal transaction generated a chattel mortgage.

As noted in 1923 there are at least two records of the chattel mortgage transactions that took place between the Washington estate and some of his tenants. The amounts of indebtedness varied between $75 and $550. Table 8 and Table 9 give a comparison of some of the tenants, their debts, and in the 1929 chattel mortgages, the number of acres they rented (Crittenden County Courthouse, Chattel Mortgage Record Books W-3:297-308, F-4:337-349).

TABLE 8

CHATTEL MORTGAGES BETWEEN
GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON AND HIS
TENANTS FOR THE YEAR 1923

RENTER	DEBT	COLLATERAL
H.A. Adaway	300.00	1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
W.C. Clark	427.09	3 mules, 1 John Deere wagon, all plow tools and farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Monroe Davis	500.00	2 mares, 1 mule, 2 cows 1 buggy, all plow tools and farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Jim Haire	175.00	1 mule, 1 mare, 1 James and Graham wagon, all plow tools and farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
James Lee	325.00	2 mules, 1 wagon, all farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Lonnie Little	150.00	1 mare, 1 mule, all plow tools and farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Andrew Martin	165.00	1 mule, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Will Stewart	250.00	1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Claude Stubbs	75.00	1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Charlie Walker	550.00	1 horse, 2 cows, 2 heifer calves, 1 James and Graham wagon, 1 buggy, all plow tools and farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Jasper Webb	400.00	2 mules, all plow tools, wagons, harness, and other farming tools, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops
Walter Wright	250.00	1 mule, 1 mare all plow tools, wagons, harness, and other farming implements, 1923 cotton, corn and cotton seed crops

Source: Chattel Mortgage, Crittenden County Courthouse, W-3:297-308.

TABLE 9

CHATTEL MORTGAGES BETWEEN ELIZABETH BOWLES FOR GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON ESTATE AND HER RENTERS FOR THE YEAR 1929

RENTER	DEBT	ACRES RENTED	COLLATERAL
Howard Adaway	$500.00	not given	2 mules, 1 wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
James Anderson	390.00	65	2 mules, 1 turning plow, 1 cultivator, 1 double shovel, all farming tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Joe Bell	225.00	40	2 mules, 1 John Deere wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Frank Bush	275.00	40	2 mules, 1 Newton wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Will Clark	225.00	40	2 mules, 1 Peter Schutler wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Fred Drake	125.00	30	2 mules, 5 plows, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Dave Hall	$ 125.00	40	2 mules, 1 Milburn wagon, 4 plows, 1 cultivator, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Charlie Hern, Jr.	150.00	35	2 mules, 1 wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Milton Horton	125.00	40	2 mules, 1 James and Graham wagon, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Emma McGee	200.00	40	2 mules, 1 narrow tread wagon, 1 turning plow, 1 Gee Whiz, 1 middle buster, 1 side harrow, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
H.C. Morgan	155.00	30	2 mules, 1 James and Graham wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
A. Reed	1,000.00	160	6 mules, 1 James and Graham wagon, all plow tools, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops
Jim Wilson	50.00	20	1 mule, 2 plows, 2 double shovels, 1 wagon, 1929 cotton, corn, hay and cotton seed crops

Source: Crittenden County Courthouse, Chattel Mortgage Record Book, F-4:337-349.

The chattel mortgage listings classify the number of animals and the type of farming implements that a tenant used to cultivate his plot of land. Most of the animals listed in the chattel mortgages are also described by name, color, sex and age. In the records examined for 1923 and 1929, only two names appear on both lists: Howard Adaway and Will Clark. Emma Reed's grandfather, Joe Bell, is listed in the 1929 chattel mortgages.

Unfortunately, these records do not specify where the renters' lands were located, nor do they mention the structures associated with a tenancy system. Emma Reed (personal communication) remembers the presence of barns and hog pens. Since both Washington and many of his tenants owned mules, there were probably also mule lots on the property (Crittenden County Courthouse, Chattel Mortgage Record Books W-3:297-308, F-4: 337-349; Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Tax 1900:66, 1905:106, 1910:52, 1915:76; Crittenden County Courthouse, Personal Assessment Tax Books 1920:93, 1925:152).

In addition to tenant housing, there were other structures associated with the George Berry Washington plantation. An 1898 trust deed between Robert Williams and Washington refers to Washington as a "merchant doing business in the town of Earle... under the firm name and style of G.B. Washington..." (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book K-2:142-143), and mentions "the G.B. Washington gin." This trust deed does not describe the store or gin, nor does it give the location of the structures.

Because the records examined do not list specific structures and because there are no will or probate records for the George Berry Washington Estate (Crittenden County Courthouse, Will Records, Vols. B, C, and D; Crittenden County Courthouse, Probate Court-Record, Vol. J), it is necessary to rely on the personal recollections of the area's residents for details of the structures associated with the Washington plantation.

According to Everett Hood (personal communication), the large country store was 40 feet by 60 feet; and Liddie McCoy (personal communication) remembers that the store sat on blocks and had a "match" floor. There was a hitching post in front of the store for mules (Ibid.) and both Everett Hood (personal communication) and Liddie McCoy (personal communication) remember that the store had a porch (Chisum, personal communication; Hood, personal communication). Washington sold groceries, hardware, farm supplies, cider, and candy at the store, which was also known as the "commissary" (Chisum, McCoy, Reed, Cloar, personal communications).

Because they were children at the time they knew Washington, some of the local informants relate childhood stories about the store. Cliff Chisum (personal communication) recalls buying cider at the store after the services at Gibson Bayou Church, while Liddie McCoy recalls that "Uncle George" gave the children free candy. It was the custom at the time for white children to call blacks "Aunt" and "Uncle." She also remembers that "Uncle George" and a little black boy raised a truck patch and sold the produce in the store (McCoy, personal communication).

The residents, when asked about the gin, all relate that its boiler exploded and killed a man but they are unclear about the date (Chisum, Cloar, Hood, McCoy, personal communications).

Tax records indicate that Washington's gin was extant as late as 1923 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Real Estate Assessments 1923:18). According to the 1923 records, the words "Gin" and "Farm": are written above the figure $1,500 in the column labeled "Value of Improvements." After its explosion, the gin was not rebuilt (Hood, personal communication; McCoy, personal communication).

When asked about the materials that were used in the construction of the gin, most local informants state that the structure was made of "tin" (Reed, McCoy, Chisum, personal communications). The gin may have been of wood frame construction and covered with sheet metal.

Liddie McCoy's father worked at Washington's gin and remembers that it had "no floor" except where the offices were located and that the boiler sat on "rock" (McCoy, personal communication). When taken to the site of Washington's plantation headquarters, both Everett Hood and Cliff Chisum point to the cement and brick foundation as the location of the gin. Plate 3 illustrates the probable gin site today.

Cedar trees, still standing, mark the location of George Berry Washington's house; the house was located behind the trees (Chisum, Cloar, Hood, personal communications). The Washington family lived in a one-story, white frame house with a front porch (Chisum, Cloar, McCoy, Reed, personal communications).

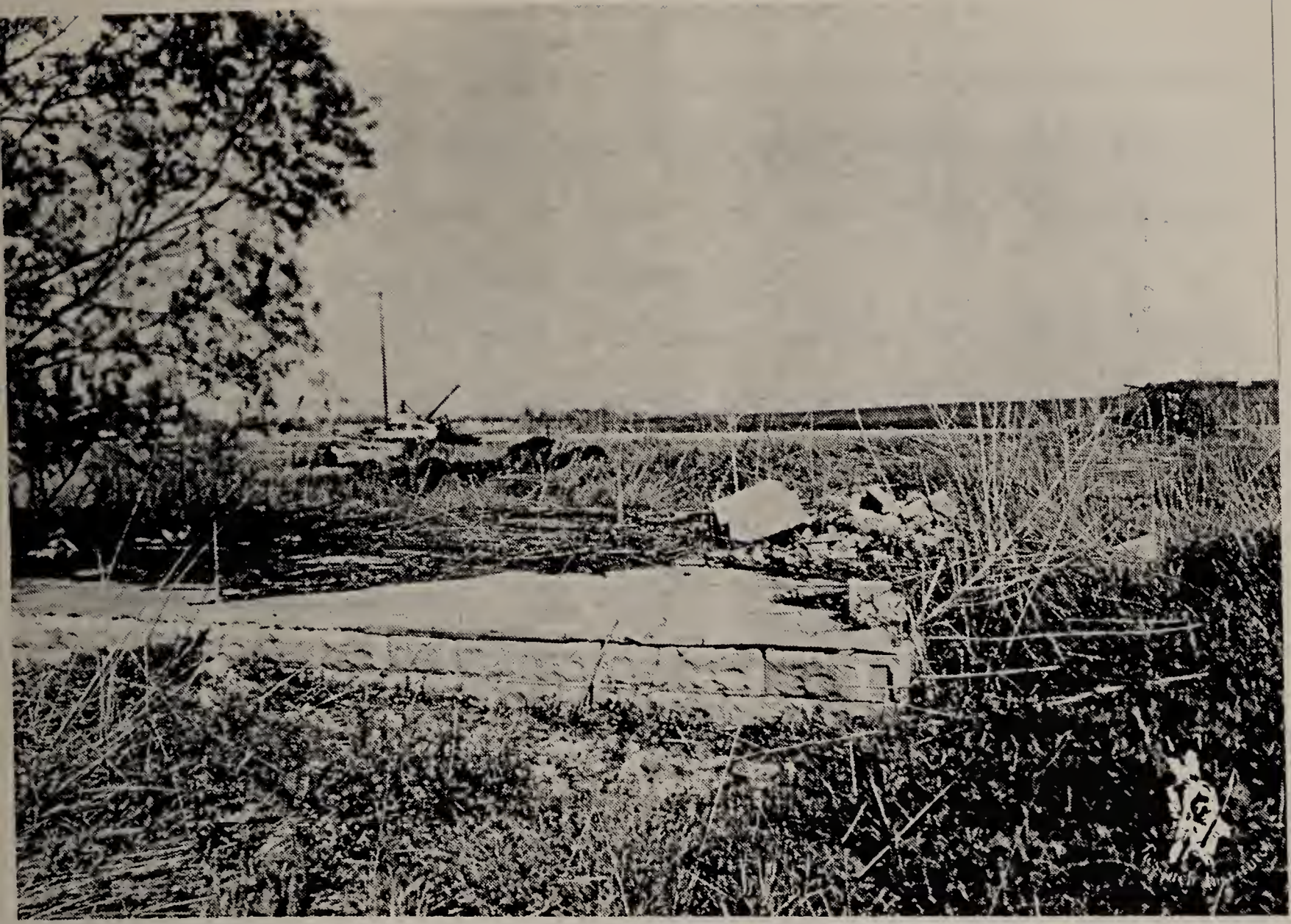

Plate 3. Cement and brick foundation at the George Berry plantation location. This foundation is probably the remains of George Berry Washington's gin. According to local informants, the gin press or gin boiler rested on the foundation. The gin was destroyed by a steam boiler explosion and never rebuilt. The precise date of the explosion could not be determined, but tax records indicate that the gin was extant in 1923.

No. 1311C-14

A wagon lot was located between the store and gin (Chisum, personal communication) but local informants disagree considerably about its dimensions and the distance between store and gin (Reed, personal communication; Hood, personal communication). Chisum also remembers a seed house next to the gin (Ibid.). Although Liddie McCoy recalls two barns of Washington "across the bayou" (McCoy, personal communication), other local informants, when asked about the presence of additional structures, did not mention them.

A dirt road, later graveled, passed in front of Washington's house, store and gin (Chisum, Cloar, Hood, McCoy, Reed, personal communications). Another dirt road crossed the bayou on a wooden bridge (Hood, personal communication; McCoy, personal communication).

After Washington's daughter Elizabeth married, she and her husband lived at a location that is currently on the right side of Highway 149 just before the winged angel monument as one travels north. The house's location is marked by a standing chimney (Chisum, Cloar, Hood, Reed, personal communications). The other daughter, Irene, lived near Gibson Bayou Church and Cemetary (Ibid.). According to Amelia Cloar (personal communication), Elizabeth and Irene lived in identical white clapboard houses.

Preacher and Mason

Although separated from the mass of blacks by his light complexion- "almost like a white man," in the words of a contemporary, Liddie McCoy (McCoy, personal communication), as well as by his wealth, George Berry Washington was actively involved in the social and religious activities of the local black community.

Washington was the pastor of St. Peter's Baptist Church and preached at the Spring Hill and Fredonia Churches (Cloar, McCoy, Reed, personal communications). According to Liddie McCoy (personal communication), he also preached to his tenants outside his store.

Some of the local informants recall that Washington and other black landowners were Masons (McCoy, personal communication; Reed, personal communication). Deed records provide some documentation about Washington's lodge activities. According to a Warranty deed signed 8 July 1902, George Berry Washington, W.M. Johnson, R.H. Pettus, and "Tyronza Lodge No. 197", paid Mrs. L.M. Norvell $40 for a lot that was situated on the corner of Baily and Cartright streets in the town of Norvell (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book F-3:352).

The Masonic symbol inscribed on the monument provides another clue to the understanding of Washington's social status in the black community. Prince Hall Freemasonry, the Afro-American branch of the Masonic Order, was founded in America in 1775. According to a study of the Prince Hall Order, "it has worked to separate its members, both socially and psychologically, from the black masses. It has done so by encouraging its adherents to

believe that they occupy an exceptional position in the black group, that they represent the finest of their race and possess outstanding abilities as leaders" (Muraskin 1975:26).

George Berry Washington died on 30 August 1928, of acute gastritis (Arkansas State Board of Health, Vital Records File No. 335). Because his name could not be found in the Will Records (Crittenden County Courthouse, Vol. J.) of Crittenden County, he probably died interstate, a surprising oversight for so enterprising a businessman. He was buried on an Indian mound and his family marked the site of his burial with a monument topped by a statue of a white winged angel, as shown in Plate 4. The monument is a description of the man and his life. Beneath the Masonic symbol is inscribed "Rev. George Washington," below which is "December 25, 1864, August 30, 1928," and then the line from the 19th century gospel hymn:

Hallelujah! Tis Done
I Believe in the Son
I am Saved by the Blood
Of the Crucified One

Washington's memory has been further preserved by a neighbor, Carroll Cloar, who later became a prominent southern artist. Washington's gravestone is the subject of his painting entitled "Angel in a Thorn Patch," and Cloar's book Hostile Butterflies, and Other Paintings (1977) mentions the painting. The Cloar Printing is reproduced in Plate 5.

Plate 4. The George Berry Washington gravestone located in Earle, Arkansas has stood on top of an Indian mound for over 50 years and is a recognizable landmark for residents in the area. The monument is crowned by a white winged angel and was erected by Washington's wife and daughters. The inscription states that the Reverend Washington was born on 25 December 1864 and died on 30 August 1928. His epitaph reads: HALLELUJAH! TIS DONE./I BELIEVE IM THE SON./I AM SAVED BY THE BLOOD / OF THE CRUCIFIED ONE. In addition to this epitaph, a Masonic symbol is inscribed on the gravestone. The inscription comes from the gospel hymn, "Hallelujah! Tis Done," by P.O. Bliss (1838-1876). No. 1302-28

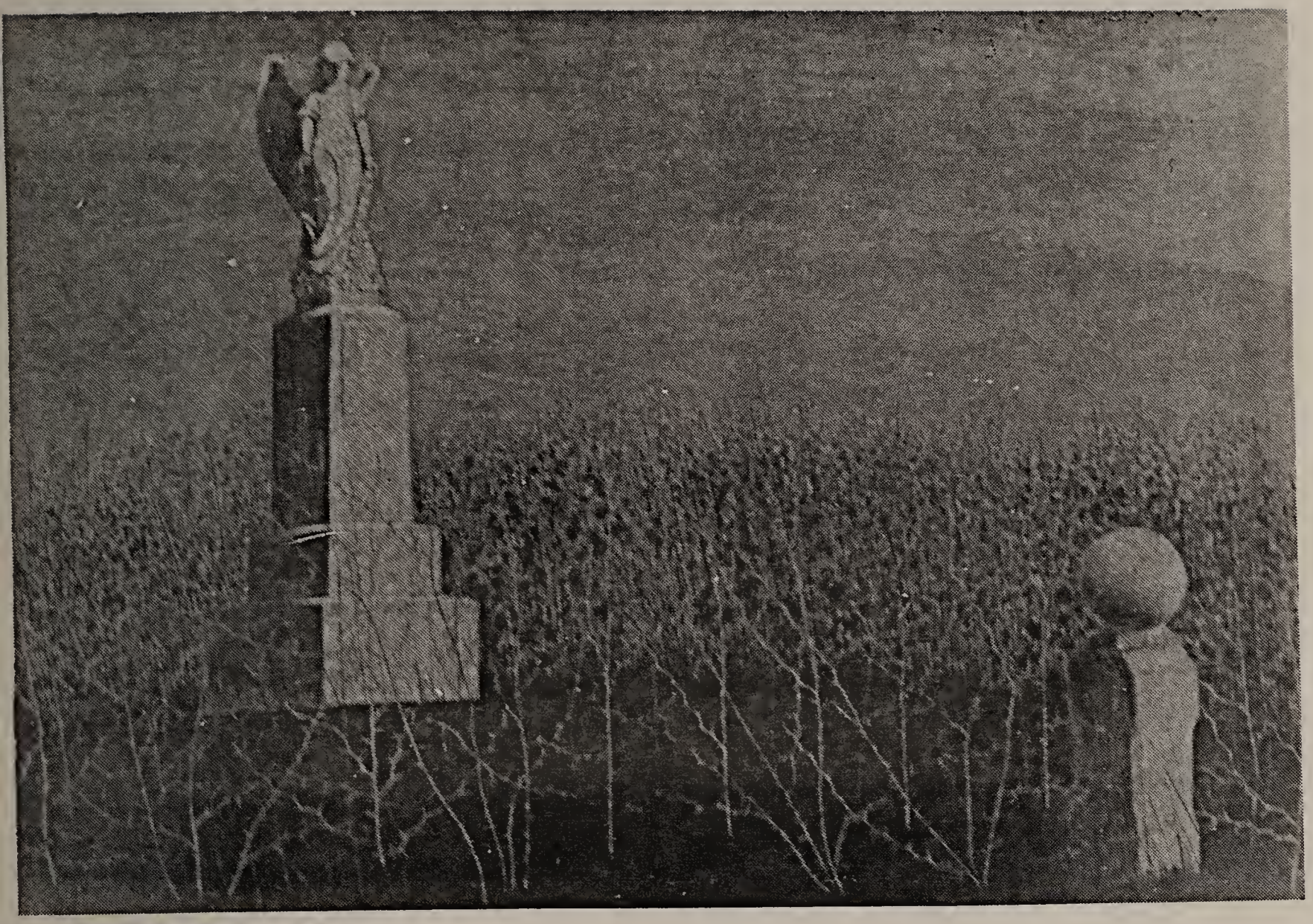

Plate 5. "Angel in a Thorn Patch" Carroll Cloar's painting of the George Berry Washington grave site. The corner markers indicated in the painting are now toppled.
No. 1302-21

Aftermath and Decline

Washington's unexpected death left his family ill-prepared to carry on his business activities. The 1930 Deed Records indicate that his wife, Lula, and his daughters, Irene and Elizabeth, owed the Prudential Insurance Company of America over $20,000; C.E. Morrison, $6,000; and the Guaranty Bank and Trust Company, $1,875 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Books 140:361, 554, 142:7).

By 1932 Prudential had recovered a judgement against Lula Washington in the sum of $26,108.50 with interest and costs, and the Guaranty Bank and Trust Company had received a judgement with interest and costs of $1,920.35 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book 145:555). According to the terms of the settlement, George Berry Washington's main plantation was sold on 7 March 1932 at public auction at the south front door of the Marion Courthouse. At this sale, Prudential purchased the land, 920 acres, as a single parcel for the sum of $28,500 (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book 145:555).

Washington's estate had already lost land in the Patterson addition to Norvell. According to the 1930 delinquent land records (Crittenden County Courthouse, Record of Delinquent Lands Sold to State A-4: 118), these lots were for sale at "public outcry" and for "cash in hand" for the amount of tax, penalty, interest, and costs due for the year 1930.

In August of 1932, Irene Washington and Elizabeth and Allen Bowles sold the Dunning Place, the last of their father's land (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book 146: 315). The George Berry Washington Plantation had ceased to exist.

BOND, BLACK AND WASHINGTON

COMPARATIVE NOTES ON THREE BLACK ARKANSAS PLANTERS

George Berry Washington was probably the greatest black landowner in Crittenden County, but there were at least two other black plantation owners in Eastern Arkansas: Scott Bond of St. Francis County, and Pickens Black of Jackson County, the latter having been one of the South's greatest rural black businessmen. Their lives and their careers should be compared to determine what common characteristics, if any, contributed to their success in a racially hostile environment.

Scott Bond's accomplishments were documented in 1917 in a biography which took the form of interviews with Bond. The biography From Slavery to Wealth; The Life of Scott Bond, The Rewards of Honesty, Industry, Economy and Perseverance, is one of the most important memoirs of black achievement in the Mississippi River valley (Bond and Rudd 1917).

Scott Bond was born in 1853 in Mississippi, the son of a white plantation manager and a house maid. He moved to Cross County, Arkansas when he was five years old, and by 1866 had learned to read, write, and figure. In 1872 he and his step-father moved to Madison in St. Francis County.

He worked for wages on his step-father's land and then rented twelve acres for $6.50 an acre (Bond and Rudd 1917). Earning money on his crop, he rented 35 acres and hired one man in 1876. In 1877 he married Miss Manolia "Bunnie" Nash of Forrest City. Even though Bunnie had been a housemaid and nurse, she helped her husband feed hogs, press cotton and work in the field. The Bonds had a large number of sons, all of whom were sent to college (Ibid.).

Bond rented a 2,200 acre plantation and a successful first year netted him $2,500. This arrangement continued into the 1880's and Bond enjoyed continuing success. During this time, he bought land for himself and after acquiring 320 acres he left the renting business.

The owners of the 2,200 acre plantation were unable to find a suitable replacement for Bond. The plantation, therefore, was sold to Bond and a white man. Bond returned to manage it. Eventually, he sold his half interest in the plantation and used the money to acquire the lands of blacks leaving for Liberia (Ibid.).

Even though his financial interests were primarily in cotton growing, ginning and merchandising, Bond was not tied to the one crop system. During times of depressed cotton prices, he raised potatoes and experimented with Jerusalem artichokes. He also made bricks, cut and sold the timber on his land, marketed gravel to the railroads, and enjoyed good relations with the merchants of Wittsburg, Forrest City and Memphis.

Because his father was white, his personal appearance was almost indistinguishable from a white man's and on Jim Crow trains he was often put in the wrong car. An interviewer of the Works Progress Administration noted that Bond's wife was seven-eighths white (Arkansas Narratives 1972). Bond was proud of his African background and never attempted to pass as white, but his complexion probably made him more acceptable to the white community than a darker skinned man.

In spite of this advantage, he encountered difficulties. For example, when denied access to the railroad loading spur at Widener for his cotton seed, Bond was told that this was his punishment for helping to make bail for a black man who was accused of murdering a white man, make bail (Bond and Rudd 1917).

Bond voted Republican and was a lifelong member of the National Negro Business League. In 1910 he addressed the league and, like Booker T. Washington, argued that blacks should make their careers in the South rather than move to northern cities. Indeed, in 1911 he was instrumental in getting Dr. Washington to visit St. Francis County.

Like George Berry Washington, Scott Bond found himself in financial trouble in 1914. His land had flooded in 1912 and subsequently produced a horde of cutworms. Even though Bond replanted his crops, he ended the year with no corn and half a crop of cotton. The next year the cutworms seemed to have doubled. According to Bond, "we would start to planting on a hundred acre piece. Before we could get over we would go back and upon examining the seed in the drills we could pick up a handfull of seed and cutworms. These pests had actually bitten off the sprouting plants before they could get through the ground" (Bond and Rudd 1917: 331-332).

Bond was forced to borrow money in order to stay in operation, and observed that "there were more merchants, more bankers, and more farmers threw up their hands and made assignments and went out of business than I had seen at any time in all my life" (Ibid.:339). However, succeeding years were good and cotton sold for 20 cents a pound in 1919 (James 1978). Bond regained control of his financial affairs and, like George Berry Washington, paid off his loan in 1921. Bond died in 1933 after being gored by one of his prize bulls (Bond 1962).

Pickens Black is a lesser known figure and has been the subject of only one short article (James 1978). He was "born about, but no later than 1864" near White Plains, Alabama (Ibid.:13). In 1878 he came to Jackson County, Arkansas when he was 14 years old (Arkansas Gazette 1955). The

accounts vary about his first years in Jackson County. He may have worked for his brother and for another man. According to another account, he "donated" or homesteaded forty acres (James 1978).

A few years after he came to Jackson County, he married Emma Henderson. They moved into a cabin on his first plot of land near Overcup Ditch. The plantation grew slowly but by 1917 Black had 6,000 acres and employed tenant farmers. His holdings continued to grow until he had 8,000 acres. According to James (1978: 14), "the time span is more than fifty years from the beginning until 350 families were renting, sharecropping, and otherwise living on his place." In order to purchase land, Black borrowed money from Colonel Henderson, his wife's former owner, and Wolff and Goldman, local merchants. According to his son Pickens, Jr., he never made a note for longer than five years and always paid his debts. During this period of growth a commissary had become a vital part of the operation and a cotton gin was built in the town of Blackville (Ibid.).

Black's land purchases continued during the Depression, when everyone else was clamoring to sell. But he declined an offer from a white man with land to sell on the Cache River, because it was white man's land and its purchase "would get him into trouble" (James 1978:17).

In the 1940's Black began converting his operations from cotton to soybeans and in the 1950's, now in his 90's, he began growing rice. At the time of his death, in 1955, he owned soybean and rice graineries as well as his 8,000 acres (Arkansas Gazette 1955).

Scott Bond, Pickens Black, and George Berry Washington were black country entrepreneurs whose accomplishments put them well above the rural

black masses of the Deep south. Even in comparison to white landowners their holdings and economic accomplishments are impressive.

We may presume that with the ending of Reconstruction and any hopes of black political or social advancement, blacks of initiative, intelligence, industry, and frugality would apply their talents to economic improvement and might, with luck, succeed economically.

Some common characteristics can be noted in the lives of these three black entrepreneurs that could account in large measure for their success. One was a lifetime of hard work. We see Pickens Black moving into the new soybean business in his nineties, Scott Bond suffering a fatal encounter with a prize bull at 80, and George Berry Washington operating his plantation, gin, and country store on into his sixties.

Finally, none of the three attempted to "pass" for white or to move into even the fringes of the dominant white society of their times despite their light complexions. All three "kept their place" and there is no evidence that any of them said or wrote anything that questioned the accepted doctrines and pieties of the time. None were involved in the "exoduster" or "Back to Africa" movements. Scott Bond's retailing of the Booker T. Washington "accomodationist" principles, Pickens Black's refusal to buy land in a white area, and George Berry Washington's black Masonic and preaching activities illustrate the point.

THE CONWAY COUNTY CONTRAST

Extensive research by the Institute to test regional significance was performed in Conway County in south-central Arkansas. An extensive class of black small landowners there is a distinct contrast to the situation in Crittenden County.

The rich farmland in the Conway County valley bottoms was already owned by whites, but a large percentage of blacks, as many as 90 percent today, owns at least a house site in the less productive uplands, raising either cotton or a variety of truck crops on their small holdings (Morgan n.d.:75).

For the most part black landowners were left in what passed for peace in the Conway County of the late 19th century. But Conway, like Crittenden, was still a county of racial tension and violence. Black farmers were compelled to "launder" their produce through white middlemen before they could sell to local canneries. As in Crittenden County the elections of 1888 saw an end to any hope of black political participation. The sheriff's possee stole the ballot boxes, and a federal election supervisor was shot at while playing cards. When the bullet missed, the official was arrested for cardplaying. The defeated Congressional candidate, John M. Clayton, came to Plummerville to investigate this fraud prior to challenging the results. This time an assassin took better aim and Clayton was killed. Several more lives were lost to insure the Democratic victory of that year (Wheeler 1975:149-155; Clayton vs. Breckinridge, 51 Congress House Report #2912:2-9).

But the black landowners of the county remained fairly secure on their small farms, strenghtened by close-knit family ties. Agricultural land in Conway was not so fertile as that in Crittenden, and the county was considered a family subsistence area (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1880:3-4). Thus there was not the same pressure to assemble rich farm land into large plantations. As a result, by 1910, 598 blacks farmed their own land in Conway, twice the number of those in Crittenden County (Morgan n.d.: 92-125; U.S. Census 1930; Agriculture, II, Part 2, 15).

Small black farmers held onto their land in Conway County and no great black planters have been located there. That Bond, Black, and Washington could rise to the planter class in a county where land was more valuable and race relations at least as volatile as in Conway County is further tribute to these rural black entrepreneurs.

CONCLUSIONS

George Berry Washington's life and accomplishments were both unusual and significant. In a rural Arkansas county in the early 20th century with an average tenantry of nearly 90 percent, a black plantation owner and operator of a cotton gin and general store was no common person. Washington's rise to prominence from almost total obscurity is remarkable.

But George Berry Washington's career was not altogether unique; other contemporary eastern Arkansas blacks, albeit few in number, managed to accumulate land and wealth. Their careers seem to follow a pattern: intense labor and frugality; the purchase of small parcels of land, usually from other blacks; the careful and intelligent management of that land; and limited personal consumption. Less tangible attributes would be an unwillingness to "agitate" racial and social norms, a quiet pride in their heritage, and the assumption of leadership positions in the local black community, and several were undoubtedly aided by their light complexions.

Despite greatly reduced political and social rights following Reconstruction and racial violence that was only beginning to abate by the early 20th century, a small class of rural black entrepreneurs had emerged in the southern states. In the midst of a dominating society that believed blacks for the most part to be biologically inferior and childlike yet menacing to public order and white womenhood, they prospered.

They persevered and represented an influential class which served as preachers, trustees, and boardmembers to the black community, as well as organizing and managing their own enterprises. They probably also served as an inspiration to those blacks who otherwise at the time would have had little other hope.

George Berry Washington, whose life spanned Southern history from Lincoln to Hoover, from Reconstruction to Plessy vs. Ferguson, was one of the most prominent of these black businessmen. Locally, in Crittenden County, Arkansas, he was undoubtedly the most significant and unique rural black entrepreneur.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has established the following criteria of significance:

> National Register Criteria for Evaluation. The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of State and local importance that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and
>
> (a) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
>
> (b) That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
>
> (c) That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
>
> (d) That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.
>
> (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Chapter I, Part 60.6).

No structures remain on the George Berry Washington Plantation site except for an undistinguished feed pen of indeterminate age. Otherwise, all that remains of the buildings associated with Washington are two crumbling foundations of no architectural significance. Archaeological and historical surveys of the site have determined that the area is unlikely to yield unique prehistoric or historic information. Consequently, Iroquois Research Institute does not recommend this site for consideration for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The George Berry Washington memorial site, by contrast, is the only standing structure still associated with the life of this significant black entrepreneur. It is in its original location on land that was once a part of the Washington Plantation. The site has not been encroached upon by other structures, roads or routes, nor has it been subdivided. The monument itself, still in a state of good preservation, is easily visible from State Route 149 and serves today as an informal marker for the Washington Plantation.

The monument memorializes a figure of local significance who was representative of a class of southern rural black entrepreneurs achieving economic success against powerful odds.

Other black leaders merit more intensive research. Pickens Black, particularly, would repay further study, for he may well have become one of the South's greatest black landowners. And more could be done with the career of Scott Bond, the wide-ranging black businessman. It is likely

that such further research would uncover other significant black rural entrepreneurs and plantation owners.

In the case of George Berry Washington, National Register Criteria ordinarily excludes consideration of cemeteries and graves. Therefore, Iroquois Research Institute recommends that an historic marker be erected on the east side of State Route 149, near the monument of George Berry Washington.

SOURCES AND INTERVIEWS

In addition to the research conducted for the general historical background of the Big Creek study area, additional research was conducted for this study on George Berry Washington.

The location of George Berry Washington in the social and economic context of the late 19th and early 20th centuries formed an integral part of the study and subsequent evaluation of his plantation operations and landowner status. Washington's plantation activities in Crittenden County were compared to the plantation activities of two of his contemporaries: Scott Bond, a black planter in St. Francis County; and Pickens Black, a black planter in Jackson County. The historical research and comparison studies of Washington and some of his contemporaries was conducted in order to evaluate Washington's local and regional significance.

Archival material at the Crittenden County Courthouse was extensively studied for information on George Berry Washington and the land and activities associated with his farmstead. The courthouse records include Chattel Mortgage Record Books, Deed Record Books, Marriage Records, Personal Assessment, Personal Assessment Tax Books, Personal Tax, Plat Books, Probate Court Records, Real Estate Assessments, Record of Delinquent Lands Sold to State and Will Records.

Interviews with residents of the Earle, Arkansas area who knew the Washington family supplemented the courthouse material. The local informants, if physically able, were taken to the Washington "plantation headquarters" site and asked to point out the location of Washington's surviving relatives in an attempt to obtain additional information on the

structures associated with Washington. Jesse H. Webb purchased much of the land previously owned by Washington. Mary Jane Webb, his widow, and Silvio Marrotti, the farm manager for the Webb family since 1956, were contacted to identify the location and function of structures associated with the Webb occupancy period.

Since it seemed highly improbable that George Berry Washington's widow, Lula, would still be living, Institute research was concentrated upon more likely surviving descendants.

It was ascertained that Mr. Washington's daughter, Elizabeth, died 22 February 1974, in Memphis, Tennessee; the search for Irene, his other daughter, has so far proved fruitless. One cousin of Elizabeth (Bowles) has been located, but so far she had not consented to participate in this study. The whereabouts of another cousin were unascertainable as of February, 1980.

Everett Hood
Earle, Arkansas
(501) 792-7430

Synopsis of Interview 1 February 1980

Everett Hood, age 77, has lived in the Earle area all his life. As a boy growing up (8-10 years old), he knew George Berry Washington. According to Mr. Hood, George Berry Washington was a "white man's negro": owner of a large country store (40' x 60'), operator of a steam cotton gin, and owner of the largest land holdings of any black man in the area.

Mr. Hood was a large landowner himself and can provide valuable information about the life of tenants during the Depression because he had 35 people working for him at that time. He also told about the formation of the sharecropper's union the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union during the 1930's and the shift from renters and croppers to day-laborers.

Liddie McCoy
1212 Alabama Street
Earle, Arkansas
(501) 792-8440

Synopsis of Interview 1 February 1980

Liddie McCoy was born in the Earle area in 1906 and has lived there all her life. Her father worked at George Berry Washington's gin and she and her brother would get candy from his store. According to Liddie McCoy, George Berry Washington's one story house had six rooms with a central hall and a long front porch. After his cotton gin blew up, circa 1917 according to McCoy, he did not rebuild it.

She called him "Uncle George" and remembered how she and a little black boy raised a good truck patch and then sold the produce in his large store. Even though there were other black landowners in the area, George Berry Washington had the largest landholding. He built houses up and down the bayou for the sharecroppers. His tenants also cleared the land along the Tyronza River and Washington could have sold his timber to a local sawmill.

Emma Reed
609 Mississippi Street
Earle, Arkansas
(501) 792-8091

Synopsis of Interview 24 January 1980

Mrs. Reed was born in the Earle area in 1916. She was a child when her grandparents, Joe and Ellen Bell, and her mother, Emma Brown, cultivated land on the George Berry Washington plantation. Her grandparents were renters and her mother was a sharecropper. Emma started working in the fields when she was seven years old. She lived in a one story, two-room wood house with her mother and four brothers and sisters. Her mother sharecropped 15 acres.

Other black land owners in the immediate area were Henry Hensley, Henry Evans, and Eliza Gibson. According to Mrs. Reed the blacks did not have the money to run their farms and by 1929 they had lost their land to the whites. After George Berry Washington's death, according to Reed, his daughters overextended their credit and their subsequent debt caused them to lose the land they had inherited from their father.

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APPENDICES

A. GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON LANDHOLDINGS

George Berry Washington's real estate comprised five so-called plantations, but Plate 6 illustrates that, with two exceptions, these landholdings were compact and could be worked as a single plantation. The proximity of the Tyronza River, Big Creek, and Gibson Bayou indicates good bottom land, but also problems with flooding and bad water.

1. The George Berry Washington Main Place consisted of 518.20 acres that were located in T8N, R6E. The legal descriptions were:

   SW¼ of SW¼ of Section 15

   E 1/3 of SE¼ of Section 16

   SE¼ of NE¼ of Section 20 lying east of the Tyronza River

   E½ of SE¼ of Section 20 lying east of the Tyronza River and north of Gibson Bayou

   NE¼ of Section 21

   SE¼ of Section 21 lying north and east of Gibson Bayou

   NE¼ of NW¼ of Section 21

   S½ of SW¼ of Section 21 lying north of Gibson Bayou NW¼ of SW¼ of Section 21 lying north and west of Gibson Bayou.

2. The Chatfield Plantation was comprised of, "among other lands," the following 146.18 acres that were located in T8N, R6E:

   N½ of NW¼ of Section 28

   N½ of S½ of NW¼ of Section 28

   S½ of S½ of S½ of SW¼ of Section 21

   Part of the SW¼ of Section 21 described by metes and bounds beginning at a stake on the line between Sections 20 and 21, 9.57 chains north of the corner common to

Sections 20, 21, 28, and 29; then north 55 degrees east 3.62 chains; then north 21 degrees east 4 chains; then north 32 degrees east 3 chains; then north 36 degrees west 1.72 chains; then south 81.50 degrees west 1.07 chains; then south 60.50 degrees west 4.50 chains to the section line between Sections 20 and 21; then south 7.37 chains to point of beginning and containing 3.30 acres

E½ of SE¼ of Section 20 lying east of the Tyronza River and south of Gibson Bayou.

3. The Marriman Place was comprised of, "among other lands," the SW¼ of Section 20 (160 acres) in T8N, R6E.

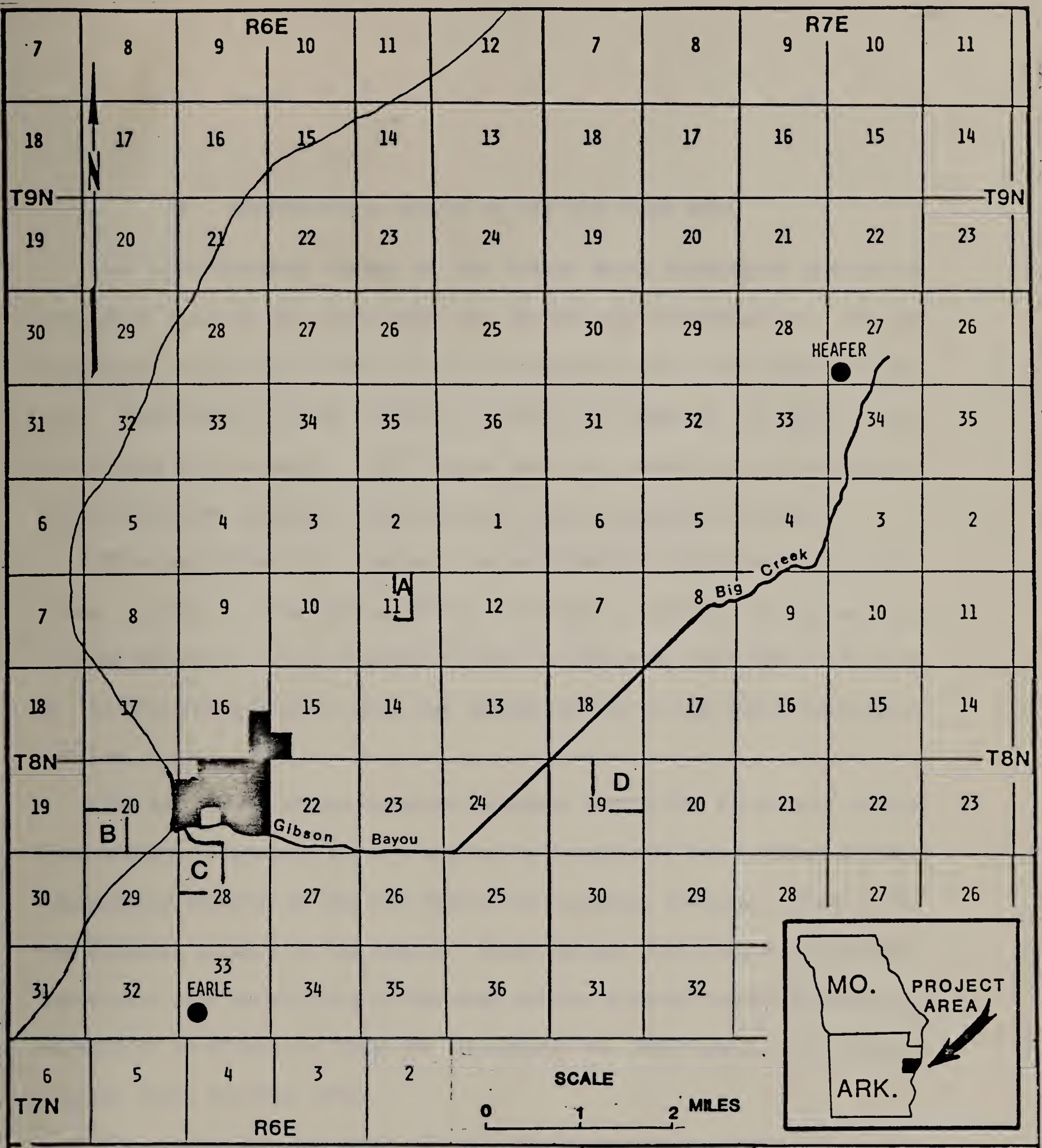
4. The Harding Place was comprised of, "among other lands," the NE¼ (160 acres) of Section 19 in T8N, R7E.

5. The Dunning Place comprised, "among other lands," the NE¼ (160 acres) of Section 19 in T8N, R7E.

The land associated with the Berry Cemetery site, 3CT47, and site BC1 #5 is included in the above legal descriptions from the deed of trust.

George Berry Washington's land transactions do not end in 1914. In December of 1919, Washington deeded five acres of his land in Section 21 of T8N, R6E to the Gibson Bayou Cemetery and Pentecostal Church Association (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book 103:545, 546). There is also a quitclaim deed between the Board of Directors of the St. Francis Levee District and Washington that was signed 23 April 1921. The Board of Directors released 40 acres in the SE¼ of NE¼ of Section 20 in T8N, R6E to Washington, but reserved any right-of-way necessary for the construction of levees (Crittenden County Courthouse, Deed Record Book 109:424). Washington's landholdings may be located by use of Plate 6.

PLATE 6



MAIN PLACE

A HARDING

B MARRIMAN

C CHATFIELD

D DUNNING

Iroquois Research Institute

PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers Memphis District

SECTIONAL MAP OF GEORGE BERRY WASHINGTON LANDHOLDINGS 1927

Crittenden County, Arkansas

DRAWN BY:

CONTRACT NO. DACW66-78-C-0054

APPROVED BY: Stanley Sandler

DATE: APRIL 1981

B. ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY OF THE BIG CREEK AREA

Any architectural survey of the George Berry Washington plantation site will have to deal with what was rather than with what is. For no structure, other than a feed pen of indeterminate date, now stands on the site. Washington's house and those of both his daughters are gone, as are his cotton gin, country store, barns, and all outbuildings; not even an illustration or published description of these structures remains.

Thus any attempt to analyze the architectural heritage of the Big Creek project or the George Berry Washington Plantation site must go outside the site, on the assumption that the surviving architectural legacy of the Big Creek project area was shared by the George Berry Washington complex.

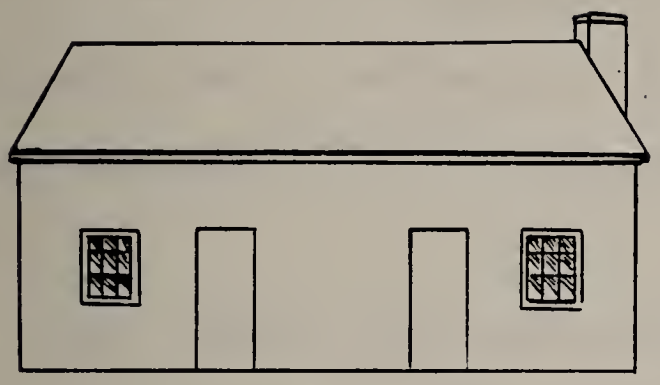
The settlement of northeastern Arkansas during the first half of the 19th century progressed slowly, impeded by swampland, dense timber stands, exaggerated reports of the New Madrid earthquakes, frequent flooding and the diseases endemic to the region. Nevertheless, isolated, single-family farmsteads were established in the area and the diversification of domestic vernacular architecture observed throughout the South gradually followed (Thomas 1930; Kniffen 1971).

The single pen log house (Figure 1) is generally recognized as the basic vernacular house type of the American South and was still being built well into this century (Wilson 1974). A one room dwelling of roughly square dimensions, averaging fifteen feet to a side, the single pen house never exceeds one and one half stories in height. A gable roof, with the

FIGURE 1

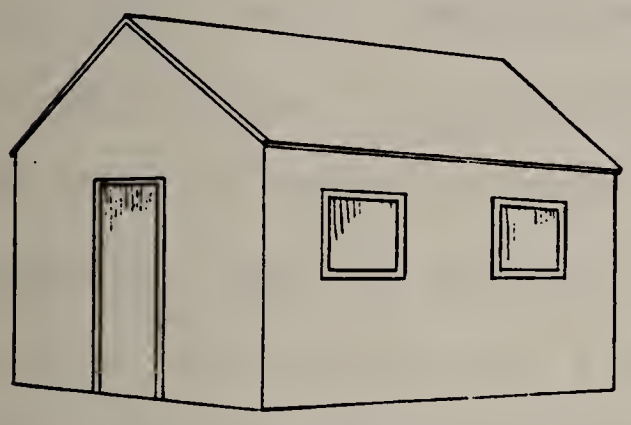
Structure Types

The Creole House Type

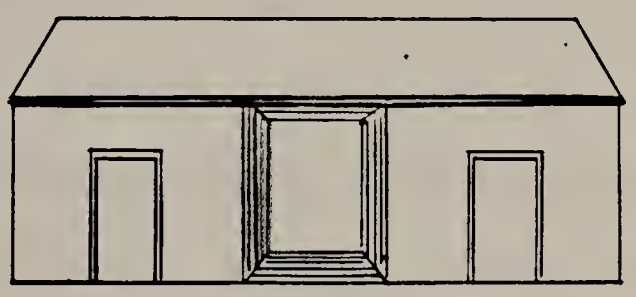


The Double-Pen House

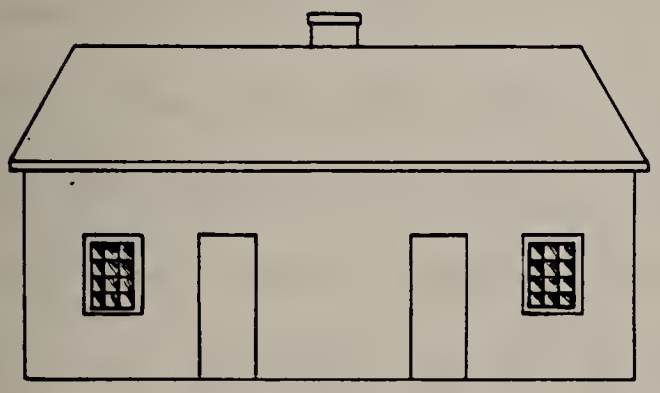
The Georgian Plan, One Story House Type



The One Room Shack

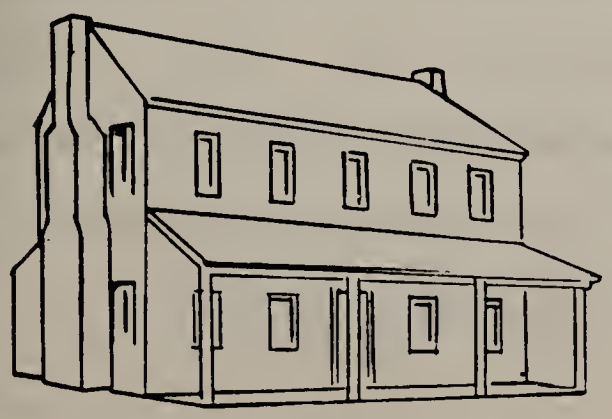


The Dogtrot



The Saddlebag

The Shotgun



The Southern I House

The Single-Pen House

ridge parallel to the entrance side and sheathed with boards, crowns the structure. Blocks or piles of stone compose an open, elevated foundation allowing the circulation of air to cool the house during hot and humid summers. Raising the sills off the ground also retards the deterioration of the wooden elements by dampness and insects. A chimney, constructed in the early days of settlement of woven sticks and clay and protected by a roof overhang, appears at either gable end (Montell and Morse 1976; Wilson 1970).

Many occupants of single pen houses eventually felt the need for greater living space. Since the Medieval era, enlargement in the English housing tradition had been achieved horizontally, that is, by the addition of an interior space to a gable end (Wilson 1970). The double pen house is essentially two single pen houses brought together under a common gable or hipped roof. Each pen retains its own entrance and the single chimney is located at one exterior end. A variation on this solution results when a chimney end serves as the juncture point for the two units. The central chimney house thus formed is called a "saddlebag" (Glassie 1968). When two roughly equal and square units are joined by a common roof, yet separated by an open passageway of eight to twelve feet in width, a "dogtrot" house is produced (Historic American Buildings 1940; Wilson 1974). A dogtrot built about 1850 near the city of Earle, is today recognized as one of the oldest structures in Crittenden County (Wright n.d.). Plate 7 illustrates a dogtrot house. The log dogtrot is the dwelling type selected as characteristic of early Arkansas settlement by a number of writers (Chester 1927; Thomas 1930; Herndon 1947). Each of the double houses was eventually built as an integral type with both parts constructed at the same time (Figure 1).

Plate 7. The dogtrot. The dogtrot house type, illustrated above by a mid-nineteenth century example near Earle, Arkansas, is almost always of log construction. The natural taper of a log and its tendency to fail by shearing forces indicated that log construction was inappropriate for even moderatley large buildings. The dogtrot represents a successful attempt to overcome the limitations of a building material.

No. 1286-11

As settlements prospered, frame construction began to appear in northeastern Arkansas. This method of building is based upon a structural system in which a "skeleton" with an external protective covering bears the weight of the building. The heavy frame, medieval in origin, is constructed of squared wooden elements, connected and strengthened by the careful joining of parts and diagonal bracing. Wooden pins or iron nails secure the joints. Like log construction, heavy frame construction is traditionally dependent upon the hand-hewing of components. Nevertheless, as saw mills were established, their products were enthusiastically adopted for frame building. When economically possible, most settlers quickly exchanged their log houses for frame ones. The heavy framed house offered greater structural stability, effective protection from the elements, and a degree of social status.

As pre-cut, dimensioned lumber came to be produced by the saw mills, another type of wooden frame was made possible. The balloon frame, an American innovation of the 1830's, and still the principal method of wooden construction today, was revolutionary in its use of dimensioned lumber, machined nails, and few or no heavy bracing members. The balloon frame was well suited to the needs of new settlement areas since its assembly required a minimum of carpentry skill, unlike the heavy frame, and could be achieved by the labor of a single man, unlike the log house (Herndon 1947; Condit 1968). Both the heavy and balloon frames are provided with weatherboards, that is, horizontally nailed overlapping wooden planks which protect the exterior walls. A gable roof with its ridge parallel to the entrance side is customary and is covered with wooden shingles. The only house now in the Big Creek project area is a deserted double-pen balloon frame structure. Plate 8 shows this house.

Plate 8. The only extant house in the Big Creek project area is this deserted example of the Balloon Frame method of construction. No. 1308-2

Another vernacular house type does not conform to the pattern established by those previously described though it appears with equal frequency, especially in the Deep South. If the two front entrances of a double pen house were shifted to its gable ends, a "shotgun" house would result (Figure 1). Room after room may be added, one behind the other, often producing a structure of extreme length, but always one room wide. The shotgun may be found in both rural and urban environments. In theory, and sometimes in practice, one could fire a shotgun from front to rear and not miss a room; hence, the name. The unusual configuration of the shotgun house has led to studies establishing an African origin for the type (Vlach 1975).

The basic domestic vernacular types just described are all subject to variations. The addition of a front porch is perhaps the most common refinement of the basic house types, and is yet another architectural feature inspired by a hot climate. Porches, often display decoratively turned balusters and columns. The products of power-driven tools such as jig-saw trim often embellished otherwise stark gables and doorways. L- or T-shaped additions, enclosing a kitchen and dining area, are also frequently observed on fold houses. Rear shed-roofed additions are also much employed (Shahn 1935; Mydans 1936).

Housing types may be disguised by the closing off or conversion to windows of exterior doorways. The owners of log houses often felt compelled by prevailing fashion to cover the exterior of the structure with weatherboards. Similarly, the breezeway of a dogtrot house might be boarded over.

Publications designed for the agricultural population such as Progressive Farmer increased in number in the last half of the 19th century. The active distribution of pamphlets and periodicals by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural College of the University of Arkansas introduced new materials, methods, and building forms to the St. Francis region. Numerous trade and industry publications became increasingly aware of the farm market. The vast amount of new information with which the St. Francis Basin was bombarded could not help but bring about an improvement in farm living. The architecture of the area, however, was threatened with the loss of its folk qualities.

New materials, such as concrete, were extolled by the publications (Anonymous 1918; Haynes 1974). The strength and imperviousness of concrete recommended its use for barn floors, all foundations, and silos. The pole frame shed or barn, inexpensive and simple to construct, yet structurally strong, was adopted in this century. The pole frame consists of posts or poles planted directly in the ground to serve as a foundation wall system and support for the roof (Midwest Plan Service 1973). It is, incidentally, a structural system basically identical to that traditionally employed by the Native Americans who once inhabited the St. Francis River Basin.

The commercial structures of the town of Earle, approximately three miles from the George Berry Washington site, consist of the gable or short end entrance and two story height scheme of the early 19th century. Many of the buildings, however, have been grouped into uniform "blocks" or attached to existing structures creating rows of connected units. The

"false front" or parapet continues in popularity. The majority of commercial buildings of Turrell and Earle are of brick, or plain or rusticated concrete block. Wood, some stone, and metal are also used in the St. Francis River Basin for public buildings (Shahn 1935; Mydans 1936).

Decorative treatment of commercial structures is confined to the front facade, often the only side of the structure visible from the street. Turrell and Earle facades are articulated with decoratively formed or molded brick, the varying placement or patterning of brick, and the use of cast iron fixtures, especially in framing the entrances. Throughout the region, commercial facades were often crowned with bracketed cornices and further enhanced by applied ornamentation of wood, iron, or tin, generally of Italian Rennaissance inspiration. The appearance of such factory-made architectural elements shortly after the Civil War was a boon to the small town merchant who desired both economy and style.

Formal Italian Renaissance and even the Romanesque revival styles were adopted for commercial buildings in the St. Francis Basin, largely due to the marketing of prefabricated building elements. The churches, banks, and especially the courthouses and city halls of the St. Francis Basin region were the buildings most likely to receive the attention of an architect. For example, the Crittenden County Courthouse in Marion, built between 1910 and 1911, was designed by Chamberlain and Company of Fort Worth, Texas. The classical revival structure with its shallow, central dome and hexastyle Ionic porticos is located on the courthouse square.

The extensive drainage and flood control programs which began around the First World War changed the character of northeastern Arkansas. The

newly drained lands were found to be rich and fertile, and agricultural activity reached an efficiency and productivity never before possible. Building activity also increased as the population shifted and grew.

As the 20th century progressed, so did the availability of building materials. Log and heavy frame construction ceased to be wise choices when cheap lumber, concrete, brick, corrugated sheet metal, and composition shingles were so easily obtained. New houses were built usually near to and in front of older vernacular dwellings. The older houses were often left standing and used for agricultural storage.

The emergence of "agribusiness," involving the consolidation of the traditionally small agricultural units into vast mechanized farms, inspired new construction according to the latest innovations. Agribusiness ultimately resulted in the decline of the rural population and a consequent growth of the towns and cities in the region. The relocation of a large segment of the rural population is reflected in the renovation of downtown Earle, completed in 1959 (Crawford 1959). Vernacular Forms were not totally supplanted but the architectural character of the area had experienced profound change.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS AND THE INSTITUTE

Iroquois Research Institute is one of the most active private research centers for archaeological and historical investigations in North America. The Institute has attracted a highly skilled staff organized in the research services of Anthropology, History, Architecture, and Environment and Engineering. In addition to the full time staff, visiting scholars are invited to participate in specialized and complex research projects.

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Bernard W. Poirier, Project Manager, is Director of the Institute with over twenty years experience in the management of scientific, cultural resource and environment studies. He has produced over 40 historical and scientific works for various entitites of the Corps of Engineers.. He has been involved in archaeological and historic mitigation activities since 1971, was a co-author of the state-of-the-art report for compliance to the National Historic Preservation Act (1977) and supervisor for the historic compliance guidelines portion of the 1980 Water Resources Council guidelines.